

## Book Reviews

**TROUBLED TIMES: VIOLENCE AND WARFARE IN THE PAST.** Edited by Debra L. Martin and David W. Frayer. Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach. 1997. 376 pp. ISBN 90-5699-534-0. \$20.00 (paper)

*Troubled Times*—a provocative mix of osteological and archaeological data, leavened with some ethnographic detail—focuses on a significant but understudied subject: violence in the preindustrial, and mostly small-scale, societies that are known only through studies of skeletons, sites, and artifacts. An editor's introduction is followed by analyses of skeletal collections from North America (Lambert, Martin, Smith, Walker, Wilkinson), Mesoamerica (Aguadé and Lory), Europe (Frayer, Robb, Walker), and Asia (Walker), as well as archaeological sites in Europe (Keeley) and North America (Maschner). A cross-cultural ethnographic survey (Ember and Ember) and a summary (Ferguson) provide a broader anthropological context for the results presented in this volume.

The contributions to this book are valuable additions to a rapidly expanding body of work that convincingly demonstrates that prehistoric times were by no means uniformly peaceful. This conclusion contradicts a curiously persistent and surprisingly common longing among scholars and the public alike for a pacific prehistory that was greatly different from a more violent modern world.

The identification of skeletal and archaeological evidence of conflict is, of course, the initial step in the study of violence in prehistory. The contributors to this volume clearly explain what they used for this purpose. While the recognition of violence might sound relatively straightforward, there has been an astounding and inexplicable reluctance among archaeologists to recognize the true purpose of defensive works and weapons, as noted by Keeley. Researchers dealing with human bones are

not as often afflicted by this particular blindness. After all, it is hard to miss the significance of stone points deeply embedded in bones. But osteologists face great problems in dealing with differential bone preservation when undertaking comparative studies, as noted by several authors.

Identifying the behavior that likely resulted in various kinds of intentional trauma can tell us much about the nature of relations between and within past societies. Much of this book focuses on evidence for outright warfare among separate groups of people. But chapters by Martin, Walker, and Wilkinson broaden osteological studies to include trauma attributable to intracommunity violence. In an examination of a broad array of ancient and recent skeletal collections, Walker found that the most common forms of intentional but nonlethal trauma varied greatly from one cultural context to another. For example, an unexpectedly large number of broken nasal bones were found in early to mid-twentieth century autopsy skeletons drawn from low socioeconomic groups. Whatever the reason for this finding—Walker attributes it to lessons learned from boxing—these results along with collections I have examined indicate that fractured nasal bones tend to be more common in modern than ancient samples.

Working out patterns over time and space in the evidence for various forms of violence represents a major challenge. Particularly fine examples of this kind of research include the work of Lambert with skeletons as well as Keeley and Maschner with fortifications and weapons. Unfortunately, studies of violence in distant times, including several of these chapters, are plagued by small samples. Another problem is the limited number of sites or skeletal collections generally used to characterize life in broadly defined regions and time periods. If this book does nothing else, it should stimulate additional efforts to fill the many gaps that exist in spotty geographical and temporal coverages. In fact, much of potential value

lies unused on dusty museum shelves, as shown by the work of Frayer and Smith on old collections of skeletons.

The most difficult issue is why the form and frequency of violence vary from one place to another and from one time period to the next. This topic is the real reason we are interested in these osteological and archaeological materials, but for the most part it awaits further research. As the editors note, it is difficult or impossible to identify from ancient remains the immediate causes of violence, such as seeking revenge, enhancing personal prestige, and the like. But this shortcoming is of little importance to the study of the social and environmental settings fostering conditions where serious conflicts were more likely to break out than in other times and places. Several authors, including Lambert and Keeley, point out that periods of increased violence seem to be associated with greater pressure on scarce or unpredictable resources, as well as population expansions at the expense of neighboring peoples.

The kinds of studies highlighted by this volume can greatly advance our knowledge of violence in preindustrial societies. Ember and Ember make the commonly voiced point that relatively recent small-scale societies cannot be considered survivals from ancient times, and thus their propensity for violence cannot be directly extrapolated to their prehistoric counterparts. This point is argued forcefully by Ferguson, both here and in his other writings, when he maintains that the intensity of conflict among newly contacted

peoples exceeds that which occurred in prehistory. Here we have one of the most important reasons for systematically examining prehistoric skeletons, sites, and artifacts: they are the only means of identifying the kinds of violence experienced by peoples unaffected by the inexorable advance of colonizing powers over the last few hundred years.

One result of the osteological work is worthy of special note. For healed injuries, it is commonly assumed that trauma frequencies increase with advanced age. Just such a correlation of fractures with age appears to be true of the broken noses in Walker's study. Yet this simple relationship was not found in fractures of the cranial vault in Walker's several skeletal samples or in Lambert's prehistoric California Indians. Nor was it found in Robb's ancient Italian skeletons where all forms of trauma were combined. Apparently the survivors of many forms of intentional and accidental trauma experienced a greater risk of death than their uninjured contemporaries.

This provocative volume will command the attention of future researchers interested in this relatively neglected aspect of the behavior of prehistoric peoples. It will appeal to a wide variety of scholars in the many academic disciplines concerned with understanding purposeful violence in human societies.

GEORGE R. MILNER  
*Department of Anthropology*  
*Pennsylvania State University*  
*University Park, Pennsylvania*

BIOARCHEOLOGY OF THE SOUTH CENTRAL UNITED STATES. Edited by Jerome C. Rose. Fayetteville, AR: Arkansas Archeological Survey Research Series No. 55. 1999. 297 pp. ISBN 1-56349-086-2. \$30.00 (paper).

Despite the publication of several major regional syntheses of osteological data over the past two decades, biological anthropologists continue to crave more comparative data in order to address increasingly com-

plex questions concerning subsistence changes, health trends, and genetic relationships among past populations. This volume has, to a large extent, answered that call. Packed with 160 tables and 39 figures, the primary purpose of this volume is to provide an exhaustive synthesis of data from both published and unpublished sources representing six broadly defined regions encompassing Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana.